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ABSTRACT

This report introduces the issues to be addressed in the establishment of a teaching center. The history of teaching centers in the United States dates to the early 1970's. Teaching centers were developed in response to student demands for relevant teaching and in response to the influx of non-traditional students. The most useful information to gather when developing a teaching center is the practical wisdom of administrators, faculty, and center directors at institutions that have such centers. Issues to be considered include mission statements, populations served, and evaluation. There are three common perspectives from which teaching centers operate: instructional development, organizational development, and faculty professional development. Organizational issues include staff and reporting structure. Budget issues include amount and sources of funding. The faculty composition is usually determined by the mission and by the population to be served. Evaluation mechanisms should be part of the initial planning and their implementation should be ongoing. Specific action items for establishing teaching centers include connecting with academic departments, addressing and involving the total faculty, devising a cohesive plan for formative and summative evaluation, using non-traditional activities, and planning for the needs of special groups. (JLS)

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Update

Developing A Teaching Center On Campus

Introduction

The history of teaching centers in the United States dates to the early 1970s (Gaff & Simpson, 1994). Teaching centers were developed in response to student demands for relevant teaching and in response to the influx of non-traditional students.

The most useful information to gather when developing a teaching center is the practical wisdom of administrators, faculty, and center directors at institutions that have already created them. Before interviewing others, though, it is important to start familiarizing planners on your campus with several issues: mission statements, organizational structures, budgets, activities, populations served, and evaluation of teaching centers. This report introduces those issues, provides the viewpoint of a small group of nationally recognized teaching center directors, and reviews what the literature offers in the way of observations and suggestions.

Mission

Campuses that decide to develop a teaching center must determine from what perspective they will address teaching. Quinlan (1991) identifies three common perspectives from which teaching centers operate:

- Instructional Development: The focus is on teaching in individual classrooms, in departments, and across the institution.
- Organizational Development: The focus is on organizational skills—such as leadership skills, interpersonal and small group communication skills—and programs that affect the environment in which faculty work.
- Faculty Professional Development: The focus is on several faculty work domains, such as teaching; research, writing, and creative projects; advising and mentoring.

Determining which perspective the center will focus on, or on some combination of the three, helps clarify what a mission statement for the center should say. The literature (Cuseo, 1989) states that the mission of teaching centers should include the goal of assisting faculty with *formative development*. That is, centers should provide activities that promote growth in teaching. Questions about the *evaluation* of faculty performance will arise and should be considered in planning for formative activities. However, in order for faculty to feel confident that teaching center activities are confidential and will not jeopardize promotion and tenure reviews, the center must be focused primarily on formative activities and feedback.

Organization

In addition to writing a mission statement and goals for the center, planners need to consider several organizational issues—both internal and external to the center. Immediate concerns include the optimal number of staff, the type of positions to create, the other units on campus with which the center should work closely, and the reporting structure outside the center.

The number of people to hire depends on what the institution wants from the center. For example, if the center is to put forth a research agenda, organize orientation sessions for new faculty, specialize in current teaching initiatives, provide one-on-one consultation, and serve teaching assistants as well, the center needs multiple staff positions with expertise in a variety of areas.

Just as important as internal organizational issues are external relations. Many teaching centers establish a formal connection with academic departments—some even create a network of teaching center liaisons. In addition to departmental support, a strong relationship with the technology center on campus is essential if the teaching center does not have a technology specialist on staff. Good working relations between teaching center and technology center staff make a more fluid response to faculty who are concerned with implementing technology into their curriculum.

External reporting is also a key organizational issue to be determined. Teaching center directors agree that the center should report to someone in central administration, preferably the provost or a vice provost with responsibility for teaching and learning affairs. This direct line to administration provides visibility, credibility, and influence for the teaching center.

Budget

Determining how much money is needed to run a teaching center depends on two key variables: the scope of the teaching center's goals, and the number and status of center staff. For example, if the center is to accomplish a range of professional development activities with four full-time professional staff members, the budget will far exceed that of a center which is to accomplish only teaching orientation seminars and workshops with two faculty who have part-time appointments to a teaching development committee.

Perhaps the most certain point about teaching center budgets comes from the research on funding sources. This research shows that centers that survive and thrive are funded from within the institution (Gaff & Simpson, 1994).

Faculty Populations

One of the most important issues to consider when developing a teaching center is the population served. Faculty who will use the teaching center may include graduate students, part-time and adjunct instructors, new faculty, junior faculty, and senior faculty. These people fulfill a number of teaching roles: advisors, instructors, assistants to instructors or graders. The most current trend in faculty and instructional development is to provide assistance to new faculty and graduate students, to ease their initial development as teachers. Research (Boice, 1992; Nyquist, 1991) documents these trends, noting how little these two groups of faculty know about teaching and how willing they are to learn.

Activities

The most common center activities are workshops, one-on-one consultations, grant programs to improve teaching, reading materials, mentoring and orientation programs, and mid-course assessment. What we know about the effectiveness of

these activities is limited. Workshops are somewhat effective in changing teaching—moreso when the time period is extended. Mentoring programs do make a difference

Many teaching centers experiment with non-traditional activities. These include discipline-specific workshops and programs, learning communities, and graduate teaching internship programs. The evaluation of these activities has been institution-specific, but most seem to hold promise for use in other institutions. Participation in non-traditional activities supported by external grants often brings the teaching center and its institution national visibility.

Evaluating Teaching Centers

It is important, even in the planning stage, to think about evaluating the work of the center. Is it serving the specific needs of the campus? Is it leading the campus in teaching innovation? Is it improving teaching?

Most centers that are attempting to answer these questions look to internal and external evaluations. Internal evaluations include evaluations of specific activities, numbers of faculty served, descriptions of goals met, sample teaching evaluations of faculty served by the center, and reports by advisory committees. External evaluations are usually conducted by a team of outside evaluators from the field of faculty and instructional development. In this decade, researchers have begun to provide frameworks for thinking about evaluative questions.

Action Items

The literature and experience in the field of faculty and instructional development suggest five recommendations for action when developing a teaching center.

- **Connect with departments.** Universities with teaching centers have long known that to gain support for teaching development centers, faculty must be involved at the outset. What universities have recently come to recognize is the importance of sustaining support and interest from faculty.

- **Consider the whole faculty member.** Even in teaching centers where the mission is clearly focused on teaching, teaching center staff recognize that teaching is intricately tied to other faculty activities. In order to be of most assistance to faculty, consider addressing teaching in the context of the total faculty profession.

- **Devise a cohesive plan for formative development and summative evaluation.** Center directors are beginning to recognize that summative evaluation systems cannot be fair if they do not provide formative development activities that will prepare faculty for the final evaluation. Consider how formative and summative activities will work together and what role teaching center staff will play.

- **Get involved with non-traditional activities.** The leading edge in the field of faculty and instructional development does not emerge from traditional activities. New ways of thinking about teaching, new ways of conceiving preparation experiences for future faculty, and new ways of evaluating teaching have come from non-traditional activities and projects. Consider expanding traditional definitions of teaching and charging the center with responsibility for non-traditional development activities.

- **Address issues related to special groups: graduate students, new faculty members, and adjunct faculty.** Teaching center staff increasingly find themselves asked to contribute to the national

conversation about the preparation of graduate students, new faculty, and adjunct faculty. Consider providing programming for these special groups.

Traditionally, colleges and universities have not encouraged the professional development of teaching in higher education. Today, however, faculty and administrators across the country are giving attention to pedagogical development. Developing a teaching center is one clear way to ensure attention to and support for teaching.

Check out the NEA Higher Education web page for a series of *Updates* on facultydevelopment: http://www.nea.org/he

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